

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7922

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 00348

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PGOV, OINT, PFOR, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: BRITISH STRATEGY

SUMMARY - NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO) UNDERSECRETARY DENIS TREVELYAN JANUARY 8 PROVIDED EMBOFF WITH HMG'S CURRENT APPRECIATION OF NI SITUATION AND DESCRIBED ITS PRESENT STRATEGY. OUTLOOK WAS CHARACTERIZED AS "CRITICAL" ON BOTH SECURITY AND POLITICAL FRONTS, WITH NIO BELIEVING IT HAS NO MORE THAN 40 PERCENT CHANCE OF ACHIEVING ITS GOALS ON EITHER FRONT. ON SECURITY SIDE, HMG HAS STRENGTHENED SECURITY FORCES IN SOUTH ARMAGH AND WILL ANNOUNCE FURTHER MEASURES TO COMMONS JANUARY 12. GOVERNMENT IS ALSO TAKING NEW INITIATIVE TO BUILD POLITICAL PARTY CONSENSUS ON SECURITY QUESTION. AND IS SEEKING FURTHER COOPERATION FROM DUBLIN. IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE IS TO PREVENT POSSIBLE PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH ARMAGH. ON POLITICAL FRONT, NI SECRETARY REES WILL ANNOUNCE JANUARY 12 GOVERNMENT'S PARTIAL ACCEPTANCE OF CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION REPORT, REJECTION OF OTHER PARTS OF REPORT, AND RECALL OF CONVENTION TO SEEK CONSENSUS AS TO FUTURE FORM OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT FOR NI. REES WILL ESCHEW USE OF "POWER-SHARING" AND "IRISH DIMENSION." PHRASES WHICH ARE ANATHEMA TO LOYALISTS, BUT

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EMPHASIZE THAT FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH MINORITY

(CATHOLIC) COMMUNITY WILL MEAN INDEFINITE PERIOD OF CONTINUED DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER. HMG BELIEVES PARLIAMENT WILL SUPPORT GOVERNMENT'S SECURITY AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES. THOUGH LABOR BACKBENCH DEMANDS FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE. END SUMMARY.

1. EXPLAINING HMG'S CURRENT APPRECIATION OF SITUATION IN NI, UNDERSECRETARY TREVELYAN TOLD EMBOFF THAT GOVERNMENT'S ACTION TO STRENGTHEN BRITISH MILITARY FORCES IN THAT PROVINCE BY DISPATCH OF "SPEARHEAD" BATTALION AND SPECIAL AIR SERVICES (SAS) TROOPS HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO HAVE MAXIMUM PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON PROTESTANT COMMUNITY IN EFFORT TO FORECLOSE MOVE BY PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY FORCES INTO SOUTH ARMAGH. SUCH A DEVELOPMENT, HMG BELIEVES, COULD LEAD TO "GRAVE" CIVIL STRIFE THROUGHOUT NI. THESE DEPLOYMENTS, OF COURSE, WILL ALSO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR IRA TO OPERATE IN BORDER AREA, THOUGH RELATIVE SAFE HAVEN SOUTH OF BORDER IN IRELAND MEANS THAT MILITARY FORCE ALONE CAN ONLY REDUCE, NOT ELIMINATE, IRA THREAT TO SECURITY. HMG, HOWEVER, IS SEEKING GREATER COOPERATION FROM IRISH GOVERNMENT (GOI MINISTER OF JUSTICE COONEY IS IN LONDON TODAY TO DISCUSS SECURITY SITUATION) TREVELYAN BELIEVES NEGOTIATIONS IN THIS REGARD ARE GOOD. PROVIDED DETAILS OF ANY AGREEMENT ARE NOT MADE PUBLIC, AS IRISH GOVERNMENT IS AS WORRIED AS HMG ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION.

2. HMG WILL TURN "PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREW" ANOTHER NOTCH JANUARY 12 WHEN SECRETARY REES WILL INFORM COMMONS OF ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED IN SOUTH ARMAGH. HMG IS STILL CONSIDERING VARIOUS OPTIONS IN THIS REGARD. GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO UNDERTAKEN TALKS WITH OPPOSITION CONSERVATIVE PARTY TO STRENGTHEN BIPARTISAN APPROACH ON SECURITY ISSUE, BUT FINAL AGREEMENT IS NOT POSSIBLE UNTIL CONSERVATIVE LEADER THATCHER RETURNS FROM EGYPT. IF THEY AGREE, GOVERNMENT WILL THEN BEGIN DISCUSSIONS WITH ULSTER UNIONISTS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY (SDLP) TO BUILD CONSENSUS ON SECURITY MATTERS.

3. SECURITY PICTURE IS COMPLICATED BY POLITICAL FACTORS.
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WHEN NI SECRETARY REES SPEAKS TO COMMONS JANUARY 12, HE WILL ANNOUNCE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO REJECT MAIN POINTS IN CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION REPORT AND RECONVENE CONVENTION FOR ANOTHER TRY AT ACHIEVING A CONSENSUS ON FORM OF FUTURE HOME RULE IN NI. HMG, IN EFFORT TO SOFTEN IMPACT OF THIS ANNOUNCEMENT OF UNIONIST MAJORITY. WHICH HAS THREATENED TO BOYCOTT RECALLED CONVENTION, IS ACCEPTING AS MANY PORTIONS OF REPORT AS POSSIBLE. IT WILL, FOR EX-

AMPLE. ACCEPT RECOMMENDATION THAT NI GOVERNMENT HAVE CONTROL OVER SECURITY FORCES, WITH CAVEAT THAT .PEACE BE RE-ESTABLISHED AND BRITISH TROOPS WITHDRAWNBEOFORE THIS BE-COMES OPERATIVE. REES WILL ALSO SPELL OUT PARAMETERS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 00348

FOR FUTURE NI GOVERN-
MENT -- IT MUST BE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL POLITICAL PARTIES --
AND EMOHASIZED THAT FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT WILL MEAN
PROLONGED PERIOD OF DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER. REES
WILL AVOID USING "POWER-SHARING" OR "IRISH DIMENSION,"
AS THEY TEND TO INCITE UNIONISTS, BUT LEAVE NO DOUBT THAT
MINORITY COMMUNITY IS TO HAVE ROLE IN FUTURE PROVINCIAL
GOVERNMENT.

4. TURNING TO RECENT IRA ATROCITIES IN SOUTH ARMAGH,
TREVELYAN DESCRIBED HMG'S APPRECIATION OF IRA STRATEGY.
WITH MANY HARD-CORE TERRORISTS RELEASED FROM DETENTION
AND THE CADRES RESTLESS FROM BEING IN RELATIVELY PAS-
SIVE ROLE OVER PAST YEAR, A MAJOR OFFENSIVE ACTION HAD
BEEN EXPECTED. PROBABILITY THAT HMG WOULD RECALL CON-
VENTION AND POSSIBILITY THAT IT MIGHT REACH POLITICAL

AGREEMENT PROVIDE STRONG GROUNDS FOR IRA OFFENSIVE ACTION. CHOICE OF SOUTH ARMAGH TO BEGIN NEW CAMPAIGN AT THIS TIME MAY HAVE BEEN CIRCUMSTANTIAL, AS THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT JANUARY 5 ATTACK (BELFAST 8) WAS CARRIED OUT BY BREAKAUAY GROUO WHICH BEGAN AND ENDED OPERATION IN REPUBLIC, THOUGH IRA PROVISIONAL ARMY COMMAND COULD
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HARDLY BE TROUBLED BY FIGHTING BRITISH WHERE THEY (IRA) ARE SO STRONG AND HAVE BORDER NEAR-BY. IRA MAY ALSO MOUNT MAJOR ODFENSIVE OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE IN NI AFTER REES' STATEMENT TO COMMONS, CLAIMING SUCH ACTION IS MERELY RESPONQE TO STATEMENT AND HMG'S INTRODUCTION OF HATED SAS FORCES. IN ANY EVENT, NEXT FEW WEEKS ARE EXPECTED TO BE ESPECIALLY VIOLENT AND WILL PROBABLY REPRESENT TERMINATION OF "CEASEFIRE" WHICH IRA STILL CLAIMS IS IN FORCE.

5. ACCORDING TO TREVELYAN, GOVERNMENT, IS 'SKATING ON VERY THIN ICE IN NI, BUT DOES NOT EXOECT TO ALTER BASIC APPROACH DESCRIBED ABOVE, DESPITE ANTICIPATED RENEWAL OF CALLS FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM LABOR BACKBENCHES AND "BROAD LEFT," OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT.

6. COMMENT: GIVEN CRITICAL SECURITY SITUATION IN NI AND PROBLEMATICAL POLITICAL OUTLOOK, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHAT ELSE HMG COULD DO, SHORT OF WITHDRAWAL. WE WOULD EMPHASIZE, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE PERCEIVED NO WEAKENING OF GOVERNMENT RESOLVE TO STICK WITH IT IN NI, AND DO NOT BELIEVE CALLS FOR WITHDRAWAL WILL BE MORE THAN MINOR IRRITANT FOR GOVERNMENT.

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